

Choosing a Forage Species for Horse Pastures

When choosing a pasture for horses or any other grazing animal there are several things to consider. I will touch on a few considerations in this article, for more information call or stop by the Extension Office.

Perennials should form the foundation for any grazing system, using annuals to fill the gaps in production. Perennials are dependable, productive and persistent. Another thing to consider is when the plants are going to be productive. Bermudagrass is productive from late April to late September, whereas Tall Fescue will be most productive from February to May and then again from September on into December.

Most of our warm season perennials (Bermuda and Bahia) are drought tolerant and will withstand grazing and treading. Many of the Bermudagrass species suited for this area need to be established vegetatively. Some of these are Coastal, Russell, Tifton 85, and Tifton 44. There is a variety that can be established from seed. Cheyenne is the only variety that we recommend for seed establishment in Georgia. Bahiagrass is another warm season perennial that is suitable for horse pastures. The two best options are Pensacola, and Tifton 9.

Some cool season perennials that could be considered are Tall Fescue and Orchardgrass. Tall Fescue is a more productive and persistent species in this area. Orchardgrass will persist between 2-4 years if being grazed, and is less productive than Tall Fescue in the fall. There are also a couple of perennial legumes that can be used in a horse forage system. Clovers can be a valuable addition to perennial pastures. They fix nitrogen, increase the grazing season, and improve forage production and quality. Both red and white clovers are perennials that can be used in horse grazing systems, however there are some problems associated with red clover and a fungal disease that can affect horses.

Hopefully this will help you build the “foundation” of your horse pasture. In an upcoming article I will talk about annuals for horse pastures, what varieties and types are best and when and how they should be used. For questions or comments please call the office at 478-836-3121